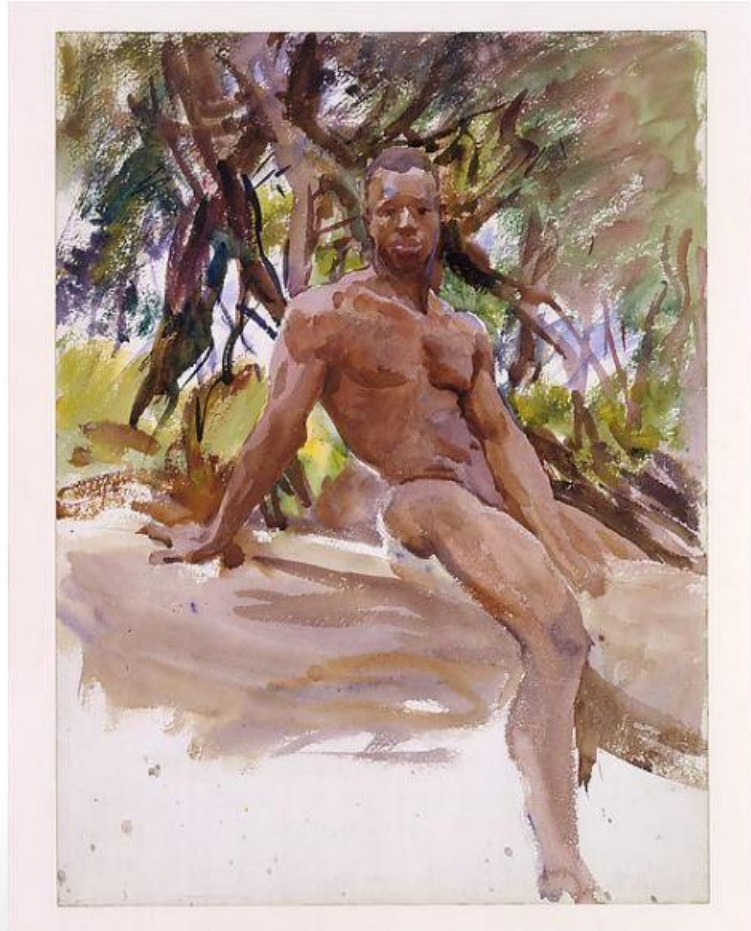


PD WEEKLY, VOL. 2, ISS 7



"Man and Trees, Florida" by John Singer Sargent (American, Florence 1856–1925 London) via The Metropolitan Museum of Art is licensed under CC0 1.0

CHARLES WARREN STODDARD
WILLA CATHER
W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM
STEFAN ZWEIG

Non-fiction works by or about the GLB community of pre-1923 era.

JOE OF LAHAINA

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Summer Cruising in the South Seas*, by Charles Warren Stoddard

I.

I was stormed in at Lahaina. Now, Lahaina is a little slice of civilization, beached on the shore of barbarism. One can easily stand that little of it, for brown and brawny heathendom becomes more wonderful and captivating by contrast. So I was glad of dear, drowsy, little Lahaina; and was glad, also, that she had but one broad street, which possibly led to destruction, and yet looked lovely in the distance. It didn't matter to me that the one broad street had but one side to it; for the sea lapped over the sloping sands on its lower edge, and the sun used to set right in the face of every solitary citizen of Lahaina, just as he went to supper.

I was waiting to catch a passage in a passing schooner, and that's why I came there; but the schooner flashed by us in a great gale from the south, and so I was stormed in indefinitely.

It was Holy Week, and I concluded to go to housekeeping, because it would be so nice to have my frugal meals in private, to go to mass and vespers daily, and then to come back and feel quite at home. My villa was suburban,--built of dried grasses on the model of a hay-stack, dug out in the middle, with doors and windows let into the four sides thereof. It was planted in the midst of a vineyard, with avenues stretching in all directions, under a network of stems and tendrils.

"Her breath is sweeter than the sweet winds
That breathe over the grape-blossoms of Lahaina."

So the song said; and I began to think upon the surpassing sweetness of that breath, as I inhaled the sweet winds of Lahaina, while the wilderness of its vineyards blossomed like the rose. I used to sit in my verandah and turn to Joe (Joe was my private and confidential servant), and I would say to Joe, while we scented the odour of grape, and saw the great banana-leaves waving their cambric sails, and heard the sea moaning in the melancholy distance,--I would say to him, "Joe, housekeeping is good fun, isn't it?" Whereupon Joe would utter a sort of unanimous Yes, with his whole body and soul; so that question was carried triumphantly, and we would relapse into a comfortable silence, while the voices of the wily singers down on the city front would whisper to us, and cause us to wonder what they could possibly be doing at that moment in the broad way that led to destruction. Then we would take a drink of cocoa-milk, and finish our bananas, and go to bed,

because we had nothing else to do.

This is the way that we began our co-operative housekeeping: One night, when there was a riotous sort of a festival off in a retired valley, I saw, in the excited throng of natives who were going mad over their national dance, a young face that seemed to embody a whole tropical romance. On another night, when a lot of us were bathing in the moonlight, I saw a figure so fresh and joyous that I began to realize how the old Greeks could worship mere physical beauty and forget its higher forms. Then I discovered that face on this body,--a rare enough combination,--and the whole constituted Joe, a young scapegrace who was schooling at Lahaina, under the eye--not a very sharp one--of his uncle. When I got stormed in, and resolved on housekeeping for a season, I took Joe, bribing his uncle to keep the peace, which he promised to do, provided I gave bonds for Joe's irreproachable conduct while with me. I willingly gave bonds--verbal ones--for this was just what I wanted of Joe: namely, to instil into his youthful mind those counsels which, if rigorously followed, must result in his becoming a true and untterrified American. This compact settled, Joe took up his bed,--a roll of mats,--and down we marched to my villa, and began housekeeping in good earnest.

We soon got settled, and began to enjoy life, though we were not without occasional domestic infelicities. For instance, Joe would wake up in the middle of the night, declaring to me that it was morning, and thereupon insist upon sweeping out at once, and in the most vigorous manner. Having filled the air with dust, he would rush off to the baker's for our hot rolls and a pat of breakfast butter, leaving me, meantime, to recover as I might. Having settled myself for a comfortable hour's reading, bolstered up in a luxurious fashion, Joe would enter with breakfast, and orders to the effect that it be eaten at once and without delay. It was useless for me to remonstrate with him: he was tyrannical.

He involved me in all manner of difficulties. It was Holy Week, and I had resolved upon going to mass and vespers daily. I went. The soft night-winds floated in through the latticed windows of the chapel, and made the candles flicker upon the altar. The little throng of natives bowed in the impressive silence, and were deeply moved. It was rest for the soul to be there; yet, in the midst of it, while the Father, with his pale, sad face, gave his instructions, to which we listened as attentively as possible,--for there was something in his manner and his voice that made us better creatures,--while we listened, in the midst of it I heard a shrill little whistle, a sort of chirp, that I knew perfectly well. It was Joe, sitting on a cocoa-stump in the garden adjoining, and beseeching me to come out, right off. When service was over, I remonstrated with him for his irreverence. "Joe," I said, "if you have no respect for religion yourself, respect those who are more

fortunate than you." But Joe was dressed in his best, and quite wild at the entrancing loveliness of the night. "Let's walk a little," said Joe, covered with fragrant wreaths, and redolent of cocoanut-oil. What could I do? If I had tried to do anything to the contrary, he might have taken me and thrown me away somewhere into a well, or a jungle, and then I could no longer hope to touch the chord of remorse,--which chord I sought vainly, and which I have since concluded was not in Joe's physical corporation at all. So we walked a little. In vain I strove to break Joe of the shocking habit of whistling me out at vespers. He would persist in doing it. Moreover, during the day he would collect crusts of bread and banana-skins, station himself in ambush behind the curtain of the window next the lane, and, as some solitary creature strode solemnly past, Joe would discharge a volley of ammunition over him, and then laugh immoderately at his indignation and surprise. Joe was my pet elephant, and I was obliged to play with him very cautiously.

One morning he disappeared. I was without the consolations of a breakfast, even. I made my toilet, went to my portmanteau for my purse,--for I had decided upon a visit to the baker,--when lo! part of my slender means had mysteriously disappeared. Joe was gone, and the money also. All day I thought about it. In the morning, after a very long and miserable night, I woke up, and when I opened my eyes, there, in the doorway, stood Joe, in a brand-new suit of clothes, including boots and hat. He was gorgeous beyond description, and seemed overjoyed to see me, and as merry as though nothing unusual had happened. I was quite startled at this apparition. "Joseph!" I said in my severest tones, and then turned over and looked away from him. Joe evaded the subject in the most delicate manner, and was never so interesting as at that moment. He sang his specialties, and played clumsily upon his bamboo flute,--to soothe me, I suppose,--and wanted me to eat a whole flat pie which he had brought home as a peace-offering, buttoned tightly under his jacket. I saw I must strike at once, if I struck at all; so I said, "Joe, what on earth did you do with that money?" Joe said he had replenished his wardrobe, and bought the flat pie especially for me. "Joseph," I said, with great dignity, "do you know that you have been stealing, and that it is highly sinful to steal, and may result in something unpleasant in the world to come?" Joe said, "Yes," pleasantly, though I hardly think he meant it; and then he added, mildly, "that he couldn't lie,"--which was a glaring falsehood,--"but wanted me to be sure that he took the money, and so had come back to tell me."

"Joseph," I said, "you remind me of our noble Washington"; and, to my amazement, Joe was mortified. He didn't, of course, know who Washington was, but he suspected that I was ridiculing him. He came to the bed and haughtily insisted upon my taking the little change he had received from his customers, but I implored him to keep it, as I had no use at all for it, and, as I assured him, I much preferred hearing it jingle in his pocket.

The next day I sailed out of Lahaina, and Joe came to the beach with his new trousers tucked into his new boots, while he waved his new hat violently in a final adieu, much to the envy and admiration of a score of hatless urchins, who looked upon Joe as the glass of fashion, and but little lower than the angels. When I entered the boat to set sail, a tear stood in Joe's bright eye, and I think he was really sorry to part with me; and I don't wonder at it, because our housekeeping experiences were new to him,--and, I may add, not unprofitable.

II.

Some months of mellow and beautiful weather found me wandering here and there among the islands, when the gales came on again, and I was driven about homeless, and sometimes friendless, until, by-and-by, I heard of an opportunity to visit Molokai,--an island seldom visited by the tourist,--where, perhaps, I could get a close view of a singularly sad and interesting colony of lepers.

The whole island is green, but lonely. As you ride over its excellent turnpike, you see the ruins of a nation that is passing, like a shadow, out of sight. Deserted garden-patches, crumbling walls, and roofs tumbled into the one state-chamber of the house, while knots of long grass wave at half-mast in the chinks and crannies. A land of great traditions, of magic, and witchcraft, and spirits. A fertile and fragrant solitude. How I enjoyed it; and yet how it was all telling upon me, in its own way! One cannot help feeling sad there, for he seems to be living and moving in a long reverie, out of which he dreads to awaken to a less pathetic life. I rode a day or two among the solemn and reproachful ruins with inexpressible complacency, and, having finally climbed a series of verdant and downy hills, and ridden for twenty minutes in a brisk shower, came suddenly upon the brink of a great precipice, three thousand feet in the air. My horse instinctively braced himself, and I nervously jerked the bridle square up to my breast-bone, as I found we were poised between heaven and earth, upon a trembling pinnacle of rock. A broad peninsular was stretched below me, covered with grassy hills; here and there clusters of brown huts were visible, and to the right, the white dots of houses to which I was hastening, for that was the leper village. To that spot were the wandering and afflicted tribes brought home to die. Once descending the narrow stairs in the cliff under me, never again could they hope to strike their tents and resume their pilgrimage; for the curse was on them, and necessity had narrowed down their sphere of action to this compass,--a solitary slope between sea and land, with the invisible sentinels of Fear and Fate for ever watching its borders.

I seemed to be looking into a fiery furnace, wherein walked the living

bodies of those whom Death had already set his seal upon. What a mockery it seemed to be climbing down that crag,--through wreaths of vine, and under leafy cataracts breaking into a foam of blossoms a thousand feet below me; swinging aside the hanging parasites that obstructed the narrow way,--entering the valley of death, and the very mouth of hell, by these floral avenues!

A brisk ride of a couple of miles across the breadth of the peninsula brought me to the gate of the keeper of the settlement, and there I dismounted, and hastened into the house, to be rid of the curious crowd that had gathered to receive me. The little cottage was very comfortable, my host and hostess friends of precious memory; and with them I felt at once at home, and began the new life that every one begins when the earth seems to have been suddenly transformed into some better or worse world, and he alone survives the transformation.

Have you never had such an experience? Then go into the midst of a community of lepers; have ever before your eyes their Gorgon-like faces; see the horrors, hardly to be recognized as human, that grope about you; listen in vain for the voices that have been hushed for ever by decay; breathe the tainted atmosphere; and bear ever in mind that, while they hover about you,--forbidden to touch you, yet longing to clasp once more a hand that is perfect and pure,--the insidious seeds of the malady may be generating in your vitals, and your heart, even then, be drunk with death!

I might as well confess that I slept indifferently the first night; that I was not entirely free from nervousness the next day, as I passed through the various wards assigned to patients in every stage of decomposition. But I recovered myself in time to observe the admirable system adopted by the Hawaiian government for the protection of its unfortunate people. I used to sit by the window and see the processions of the less afflicted come for little measures of milk, morning and evening. Then there was a continuous raid upon the ointment-pot, with the contents of which they delighted to anoint themselves. Trifling disturbances sometimes brought the plaintiff and defendant to the front gate, for final judgment at the hands of their beloved keeper. And it was a constant entertainment to watch the progress of events in that singular little world of doomed spirits. They were not unhappy. I used to hear them singing every evening: their souls were singing while their bodies were falling rapidly to dust. They continued to play their games, as well as they could play them with the loss of a finger joint or a toe, from week to week: it is thus gradually and thus slowly that they died, feeling their voices growing fainter and their strength less, as the idle days passed over them and swept them to the tomb.

Sitting at the window on the second evening, as the patients came up for milk, I observed one of them watching me intently, and apparently trying

to make me understand something or other, but what that something was I could not guess. He rushed to the keeper and talked excitedly with him for a moment, and then withdrew to one side of the gate and waited till the others were served with their milk, still watching me all the while. Then the keeper entered and told me how I had a friend out there who wished to speak with me,--some one who had seen me somewhere, he supposed, but whom I would hardly remember. It was their way never to forget a face they had once become familiar with. Out I went. There was a face I could not have recognized as anything friendly or human. Knots of flesh stood out upon it; scar upon scar disfigured it. The expression was like that of a mummy, stony and withered. The outlines of a youthful figure were preserved, but the hands and feet were pitiful to look at. What was this ogre that knew me and loved me still?

He soon told me who he once had been, but was no longer. Our little, unfortunate "Joe," my Lahaina charge. In his case the disease had spread with fearful rapidity: the keeper thought he could hardly survive the year. Many linger year after year, and cannot die; but Joe was more fortunate. His life had been brief and passionate, and death was now hastening him to his dissolution.

Joe was forbidden to come near me, so he crouched down by the fence, and pressing his hands between the pickets sifted the dust at my feet, while he wailed in a low voice, and called me, over and over, "dear friend," "good friend," and "master." I wish I had never seen him so humbled. To think of my disreputable little _protégé_, who was wont to lord it over me as though he had been a born chief,--to think of Joe as being there in his extremity, grovelling in the dust at my feet; forbidden to climb the great wall of flowers that towered between him and his beautiful world, while the rough sea lashed the coast about him, and his only companions were such hideous foes as would frighten one out of a dream!

How I wanted to get close to him! but I dared not; so we sat there with the slats of the fence between us, while we talked very long in the twilight; and I was glad when it grew so dark that I could no longer see his face,--his terrible face, that came to kill the memory of his former beauty.

And Joe wondered whether I still remembered how we used to walk in the night, and go home, at last, to our little house when Lahaina was as still as death, and you could almost hear the great stars throbbing in the clear sky! How well I remembered it, and the day when we went a long way down the beach, and, looking back, saw a wide curve of the land cutting the sea like a sickle, and turning up a white and shining swath! Then, in another place, a grove of cocoa-palms and a melancholy, monastic-looking building, with splendid palm-branches in its broad windows; for it was just after Palm Sunday, and the building belonged to a Sisterhood. And I remembered how the clouds fell and the rain drove

as into a sudden shelter, and we ate tamarind-jam, spread thick on thin slices of bread, and were supremely happy. In this connection, I could not forget how Joe became very unruly about that time, and I got mortified, and found great difficulty in getting him home at all; and yet the memory of it would have been perfect but for this fate. O Joe! my poor, dear, terrible cobra! to think that I should ever be afraid to look into your face in my life!

Joe wanted to call to my mind one other reminiscence,--a night when we two walked to the old wharf, and went out to the end of it, and sat there looking inland, watching the inky waves slide up and down the beach, while the full moon rose over the superb mountains where the clouds were heaped like wool, and the very air seemed full of utterances that you could almost hear and understand but for something that made all a mystery. I tried then, if ever I tried in my life, to make Joe a little less bad than he was naturally, and he seemed nearly inclined to be better, and would, I think, have been so, but for the thousand temptations that gravitated to him when we got on solid earth again. He forgot my precepts then, and I'm afraid I forgot them myself. Joe remembered that night vividly. I was touched to hear him confess it; and I pray earnestly that that one moment may plead for him in the last day, if, indeed, he needs any special plea other than that Nature has published for her own.

"Sing for me, Joe," said I; and Joe, still crouching on the other side of the lattice, sang some of his old songs. One of them, a popular melody, was echoed through the little settlement, where faint voices caught up the chorus, and the night was wildly and weirdly musical. We walked by the sea the next day, and the day following that, Joe taking pains to stay on the leeward side of me,--he was so careful to keep the knowledge of his fate uppermost in his mind: how could I dismiss it from my own, when it was branded in his countenance? The desolated beauty of his face pleaded for measureless pity, and I gave it, out of my prodigality, yet felt that I could not begin to give sufficient.

Link by link he was casting off his hold on life; he was no longer a complete being; his soul was prostrated in the miry clay, and waited, in agony, its long deliverance.

In leaving the leper village, I had concluded to say nothing to Joe, other than the usual "_aloha_" at night, when I could ride off, in the darkness, and, sleeping at the foot of the cliff, ascend it in the first light of the morning, and get well on my journey before the heat of the day. We took a last walk by the rocks on the shore; heard the sea breathing its long breath under the hollow cones of lava, with a noise like a giant leper in his asthmatic agony. Joe heard it, and laughed a little, and then grew silent; and finally said he wanted to leave the place,--he hated it; he loved Lahaina dearly: how was everybody in

Lahaina?--a question he had asked me hourly since my arrival.

When night came I asked Joe to sing, as usual; so he gathered his mates about him, and they sang the songs I liked best. The voices rang, sweeter than ever, up from the group of singers congregated a few rods off, in the darkness; and while they sang, my horse was saddled, and I quietly bade adieu to my dear friends, the keepers, and mounting, walked the horse slowly up the grass-grown road. I shall never see little Joe again, with his pitiful face, growing gradually as dreadful as a cobra's, and almost as fascinating in its hideousness. I waited, a little way off, in the darkness, waited and listened, till the last song was ended, and I knew he would be looking for me, to say _Good-night_. But he didn't find me; and he will never again find me in this life, for I left him sitting in the dark door of his sepulchre,--sitting and singing in the mouth of his grave,--clothed all in death.



WALT WHITMAN

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *A Collection of Stories, Reviews and Essays*, by Willa Cather

Speaking of monuments reminds one that there is more talk about a monument to Walt Whitman, "the good, gray poet." Just why the adjective good is always applied to Whitman it is difficult to discover, probably because people who could not understand him at all took it for granted that he meant well. If ever there was a poet who had no literary ethics at all beyond those of nature, it was he. He was neither good nor bad, any more than are the animals he continually admired and envied. He was a poet without an exclusive sense of the poetic, a man without the finer discriminations, enjoying everything with the unreasoning enthusiasm of a boy. He was the poet of the dung hill as well as of the mountains, which is admirable in theory but excruciating in verse. In the same paragraph he informs you that, "The pure contralto sings in the organ loft," and that "The malformed limbs are tied to the table, what is removed drop horribly into a pail." No branch of surgery is poetic, and that hopelessly prosaic word "pail" would kill a whole volume of sonnets. Whitman's poems are reckless rhapsodies over creation in general, some times sublime, some times ridiculous. He declares that the ocean with its "imperious waves, commanding" is beautiful, and that the fly-specks on the walls are also beautiful. Such catholic taste may go in science, but in poetry their results are sad. The poet's

task is usually to select the poetic. Whitman never bothers to do that, he takes everything in the universe from fly-specks to the fixed stars. His "Leaves of Grass" is a sort of dictionary of the English language, and in it is the name of everything in creation set down with great reverence but without any particular connection.

But however ridiculous Whitman may be there is a primitive elemental force about him. He is so full of hardiness and of the joy of life. He looks at all nature in the delighted, admiring way in which the old Greeks and the primitive poets did. He exults so in the red blood in his body and the strength in his arms. He has such a passion for the warmth and dignity of all that is natural. He has no code but to be natural, a code that this complex world has so long outgrown. He is sensual, not after the manner of Swinbourne and Gautier, who are always seeking for perverted and bizarre effects on the senses, but in the frank fashion of the old barbarians who ate and slept and married and smacked their lips over the mead horn. He is rigidly limited to the physical, things that quicken his pulses, please his eyes or delight his nostrils. There is an element of poetry in all this, but it is by no means the highest. If a joyous elephant should break forth into song, his lay would probably be very much like Whitman's famous "song of myself." It would have just about as much delicacy and deftness and discriminations. He says:

"I think I could turn and live with the animals. They are so placid and self-contained, I stand and look at them long and long. They do not sweat and whine about their condition. They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins. They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God. Not one is dissatisfied nor not one is demented with the mania of many things. Not one kneels to another nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago. Not one is respectable or unhappy, over the whole earth." And that is not irony on nature, he means just that, life meant no more to him. He accepted the world just as it is and glorified it, the seemly and unseemly, the good and the bad. He had no conception of a difference in people or in things. All men had bodies and were alike to him, one about as good as another. To live was to fulfil all natural laws and impulses. To be comfortable was to be happy. To be happy was the ultimatum. He did not realize the existence of a conscience or a responsibility. He had no more thought of good or evil than the folks in Kipling's Jungle book.

And yet there is an undeniable charm about this optimistic vagabond who is made so happy by the warm sunshine and the smell of spring fields. A sort of good fellowship and whole-heartedness in every line he wrote. His veneration for things physical and material, for all that is in water or air or land, is so real that as you read him you think for the moment that you would rather like to live so if

you could. For the time you half believe that a sound body and a strong arm are the greatest things in the world. Perhaps no book shows so much as "Leaves of Grass" that keen senses do not make a poet. When you read it you realize how spirited a thing poetry really is and how great a part spiritual perceptions play in apparently sensuous verse, if only to select the beautiful from the gross.

Nebraska State Journal, January 19, 1896

HENRY JAMES

ibid

Their mania for careless and hasty work is not confined to the lesser men. Howells and Hardy have gone with the crowd. Now that Stevenson is dead I can think of but one English speaking author who is really keeping his self-respect and sticking for perfection. Of course I refer to that mighty master of language and keen student of human actions and motives, Henry James. In the last four years he has published, I believe, just two small volumes, "The Lesson of the Master" and "Terminations," and in those two little volumes of short stories he who will may find out something of what it means to be really an artist. The framework is perfect and the polish is absolutely without flaw. They are sometimes a little hard, always calculating and dispassionate, but they are perfect. I wish James would write about modern society, about "degeneracy" and the new woman and all the rest of it. Not that he would throw any light on it. He seldom does; but he would say such awfully clever things about it, and turn on so many side-lights. And then his sentences! If his character novels were all wrong one could read him forever for the mere beauty of his sentences. He never lets his phrases run away with him. They are never dull and never too brilliant. He subjects them to the general tone of his sentence and has his whole paragraph partake of the same predominating color. You are never startled, never surprised, never thrilled or never enraptured; always delighted by that masterly prose that is as correct, as classical, as calm and as subtle as the music of Mozart.

The Courier, November 16, 1895



BY THE ROAD—I AND II

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Land of The Blessed Virgin; Sketches and Impressions in Andalusia*, by William Somerset Maugham

The approach to Carmona is a very broad, white street, much too wide for the cottages which line it, deserted; and the young trees planted on either side are too small to give shade. The sun beat down with a fierce glare and the dust rose in clouds as I passed. Presently I came to a great Moorish gateway, a dark mass of stone, battlemented, with a lofty horseshoe arch. People were gathered about it in many-coloured groups, I found it was a holiday in Carmona, and the animation was unwonted; in a corner stood the hut of the _Consumo_, and the men advanced to examine my saddle-bags. I passed through, into the town, looking right and left for a _parador_, an hostelry whereat to leave my horse. I bargained for the price of food and saw Aguador comfortably stalled; then made my way to the Nekropolis where lived my host. There are many churches in Carmona, and into one of these I entered; it had nothing of great interest, but to a certain degree it was rich, rich in its gilded woodwork and in the brocade that adorned the pillars; and I felt that these Spanish churches lent a certain dignity to life: for all the careless flippancy of Andalusia they still remained to strike a nobler note. I forgot willingly that the land was priest-ridden and superstitious, so that a Spaniard could tell me bitterly that there were but two professions open to his countrymen, the priesthood and the bull-ring. It was pleasant to rest in that cool and fragrant darkness.

My host was an archæologist, and we ate surrounded by broken earthenware, fragmentary mosaics, and grinning skulls. It was curious afterwards to wander in the graveyard which, with indefatigable zeal, he had excavated, among the tombs of forgotten races, letting oneself down to explore the subterranean cells. The paths he had made in the giant cemetery were lined with a vast number of square sandstone boxes which had contained human ashes; and now, when the lid was lifted, a green lizard or a scorpion darted out. From the hill I saw stretched before me the great valley of the Guadalquivir: with the squares of olive and of ploughed field, and the various greens of the corn, it was like a vast, multi-coloured carpet. But later, with the sunset, black clouds arose, splendidly piled upon one another; and the twilight air was chill and grey. A certain sternness came over the olive-groves, and they might well have served as a reproach to the facile Andaluz; for their cold passionless green seemed to offer a warning to his folly.

At night my host left me to sleep in the village, and I lay in bed alone in the little house among the tombs; it was very silent. The wind sprang up and blew about me, whistling through the windows, whistling weirdly;

and I felt as though the multitudes that had been buried in that old cemetery filled the air with their serried numbers, a vast, silent congregation waiting motionless for they knew not what. I recalled a gruesome fact that my friend had told me: not far from there, in tombs that he had disinterred the skeletons lay huddled spasmodically, with broken skulls and a great stone by the side; for when a man, he said, lay sick unto death, his people took him, and placed him in his grave, and with the stone killed him.

* * *

In the morning I set out again. It was five-and-thirty miles to Ecija, but a new high road stretched from place to place and I expected easy riding. Carmona stands on the top of a precipitous hill, round which winds the beginning of the road; below, after many zigzags, I saw its continuation, a straight white line reaching as far as I could see. In Andalusia, till a few years ago, there were practically no high roads, and even now they are few and bad. The chief communication from town to town is usually an uneven track, which none attempts to keep up, with deep ruts, and palmetto growing on either side, and occasional pools of water. A day's rain makes it a quagmire, impassable for anything beside the sure-footed mule.

I went on, meeting now and then a string of asses, their panniers filled with stones or with wood for Carmona; the drivers sat on the rump of the hindmost animal, for that is the only comfortable way to ride a donkey. A peasant trotted briskly by on his mule, his wife behind him with her arms about his waist. I saw a row of ploughs in a field; to each were attached two oxen, and they went along heavily, one behind the other in regular line. By the side of every pair a man walked bearing a long goad, and one of them sang a *Malagueña*, its monotonous notes rising and falling slowly. From time to time I passed a white farm, a little way from the road, invitingly cool in the heat; the sun began to beat down fiercely. The inevitable storks were perched on a chimney, by their big nest; and when they flew in front of me, with their broad white wings and their red legs against the blue sky, they gave a quaint impression of a Japanese screen.

A farmhouse such as this seems to me always a type of the Spanish impenetrability. I have been over many of them, and know the manner of their rooms and the furniture, the round of duties there performed and how the day is portioned out; but the real life of the inhabitants escapes me. My knowledge is merely external. I am conscious that it is the same of the Andalusians generally, and am dismayed because I know practically nothing more after a good many years than I learnt in the first months of my acquaintance with them. Below the superficial similarity with the rest of Europe which of late they have acquired, there is a difference which makes it impossible to get at the bottom of

their hearts. They have no openness as have the French and the Italians, with whom a good deal of intimacy is possible even to an Englishman, but on the contrary an Eastern reserve which continually baffles me. I cannot realise their thoughts nor their outlook. I feel always below the grace of their behaviour the instinctive, primeval hatred of the stranger.

Gradually the cultivation ceased, and I saw no further sign of human beings. I returned to the desert of the previous day, but the land was more dreary. The little groves of pine-trees had disappeared, there were no olives, no cornfields, not even the aloe nor the wilder cactus; but on either side as far as the horizon, desert wastes, littered with stones and with rough boulders, grown over only by palmetto. For many miles I went, dismounting now and then to stretch my legs and sauntering a while with the reins over my shoulder. Towards mid-day I rested by the wayside and let Aguador eat what grass he could.

Presently, continuing my journey, I caught sight of a little hovel where the fir-branch over the door told me wine was to be obtained. I fastened my horse to a ring in the wall, and, going in, found an aged crone who gave me a glass of that thin white wine, produce of the last year's vintage, which is called _Vino de la Hoja_, wine of the leaf; she looked at me incuriously as though she saw so many people and they were so much alike that none repaid particular scrutiny. I tried to talk with her, for it seemed a curious life that she must lead, alone in that hut many miles from the nearest hamlet, with never a house in sight; but she was taciturn and eyed me now with something like suspicion. I asked for food, but with a sullen frown she answered that she had none to spare. I inquired the distance to Luisiana, a village on the way to Ecija where I had proposed to lunch, and shrugging her shoulders, she replied: 'How should I know!' I was about to go when I heard a great clattering, and a horseman galloped up. He dismounted and walked in, a fine example of the Andalusian countryman, handsome and tall, well-shaved, with close-cropped hair. He wore elaborately decorated gaiters, the usual short, close-fitting jacket, and a broad-brimmed hat; in his belt were a knife and a revolver, and slung across his back a long gun. He would have made an admirable brigand of comic-opera; but was in point of fact a farmer riding, as he told me, to see his _novia_, or lady-love, at a neighbouring farm.

I found him more communicative and in the politest fashion we discussed the weather and the crops. He had been to Seville.

'_Che maravilla!_' he cried, waving his fine, strong hands. 'What a marvel! But I cannot bear the town-folk. What thieves and liars!'

'Town-folk should stick to the towns,' muttered the old woman, looking at me somewhat pointedly.

The remark drew the farmer's attention more closely to me.

'And what are you doing here?' he asked.

'Riding to Ecija.'

'Ah, you're a commercial traveller,' he cried, with fine scorn. 'You foreigners bleed the country of all its money. You and the government!'

'Rogues and vagabonds!' muttered the old woman.

Notwithstanding, the farmer with much condescension accepted one of my cigars, and made me drink with him a glass of _aguardiente_.

We went off together. The mare he rode was really magnificent, rather large, holding her head beautifully, with a tail that almost swept the ground. She carried as if it were nothing the heavy Spanish saddle, covered with a white sheep-skin, its high triangular pommel of polished wood. Our ways, however, quickly diverged. I inquired again how far it was to the nearest village.

'Eh!' said the farmer, with a vague gesture. 'Two leagues. Three leagues. _Quien sabe?_ Who knows? _Adios!_'

He put the spurs to his mare and galloped down a bridle-track. I, whom no fair maiden awaited, trotted on soberly.

BY THE ROAD--II

The endless desert grew rocky and less sandy, the colours duller. Even the palmetto found scanty sustenance, and huge boulders, strewn as though some vast torrent had passed through the plain, alone broke the desolate flatness. The dusty road pursued its way, invariably straight, neither turning to one side nor to the other, but continually in front of me, a long white line.

Finally in the distance I saw a group of white buildings and a cluster of trees. I thought it was Luisiana, but Luisiana, they had said, was a populous hamlet, and here were only two or three houses and not a soul. I rode up and found among the trees a tall white church, and a pool of murky water, further back a low, new edifice, which was evidently a monastery, and a _posada_. Presently a Franciscan monk in his brown cowl

came out of the church, and he told me that Luisiana was a full league off, but that food could be obtained at the neighbouring inn.

The _posada_ was merely a long barn, with an open roof of wood, on one side of which were half a dozen mangers and in a corner two mules. Against another wall were rough benches for travellers to sleep on. I dismounted and walked to the huge fireplace at one end, where I saw three very old women seated like witches round a _brasero_, the great brass dish of burning cinders. With true Spanish stolidity they did not rise as I approached, but waited for me to speak, looking at me indifferently. I asked whether I could have anything to eat.

'Fried eggs.'

'Anything else?'

The hostess, a tall creature, haggard and grim, shrugged her shoulders. Her jaws were toothless, and when she spoke it was difficult to understand. I tied Aguador to a manger and took off his saddle. The old women stirred themselves at last, and one brought a portion of chopped straw and a little barley. Another with the bellows blew on the cinders, and the third, taking eggs from a basket, fried them on the _brasero_. Besides, they gave me coarse brown bread and red wine, which was coarser still; for dessert the hostess went to the door and from a neighbouring tree plucked oranges.

When I had finished--it was not a very substantial meal--I drew my chair to the _brasero_ and handed round my cigarette-case. The old women helped themselves, and a smile of thanks made the face of my gaunt hostess somewhat less repellent. We smoked a while in silence.

'Are you all alone here?' I asked, at length.

The hostess made a movement of her head towards the country. 'My son is out shooting,' she said, 'and two others are in Cuba, fighting the rebels.'

'God protect them!' muttered another.

'All our sons go to Cuba now,' said the first. 'Oh, I don't blame the Cubans, but the government.'

An angry light filled her eyes, and she lifted her clenched hand, cursing the rulers at Madrid who took her children. 'They're robbers and fools. Why can't they let Cuba go? It isn't worth the money we pay in taxes.'

She spoke so vehemently, mumbling the words between her toothless gums,

that I could scarcely make them out.

'In Madrid they don't care if the country goes to rack and ruin so long as they fill their purses. Listen.' She put one hand on my arm. 'My boy came back with fever and dysentery. He was ill for months--at death's door--and I nursed him day and night. And almost before he could walk they sent him out again to that accursed country.'

The tears rolled heavily down her wrinkled cheeks.

* * *

Luisiana is a curious place. It was a colony formed by Charles III. of Spain with Germans whom he brought to people the desolate land; and I fancied the Teuton ancestry was apparent in the smaller civility of the inhabitants. They looked sullenly as I passed, and none gave the friendly Andalusian greeting. I saw a woman hanging clothes on the line outside her house; she had blue eyes and flaxen hair, a healthy red face, and a solidity of build which proved the purity of her northern blood. The houses, too, had a certain exotic quaintness; notwithstanding the universal whitewash of the South, there was about them still a northern character. They were prim and regularly built, with little plots of garden; the fences and the shutters were bright green. I almost expected to see German words on the post-office and on the tobacco-shop, and the grandiloquent Spanish seemed out of place; I thought the Spanish clothes of the men sat upon them uneasily.

The day was drawing to a close and I pushed on to reach Ecija before night, but Aguador was tired and I was obliged mostly to walk. Now the highway turned and twisted among little hills and it was a strange relief to leave the dead level of the plains: on each side the land was barren and desolate, and in the distance were dark mountains. The sky had clouded over, and the evening was grey and very cold; the solitude was awful. At last I overtook a pedlar plodding along by his donkey, the panniers filled to overflowing with china and glass, which he was taking to sell in Ecija. He wished to talk, but he was going too slowly, and I left him. I had hills to climb now, and at the top of each expected to see the town, but every time was disappointed. The traces of man surrounded me at last; again I rode among olive-groves and cornfields; the highway now was bordered with straggling aloes and with hedges of cactus.

At last! I reached the brink of another hill, and then, absolutely at my feet, so that I could have thrown a stone on its roofs, lay Ecija with its numberless steeples.



THE RIMBAUD EPISODE

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Paul Verlaine*, by Stefan Zweig

Translator: O. F. Theis

No matter how much a writer may have striven for the unusual or have tried to order confusing ways with intelligence and form, his fiction does not reach the depths nor is it as tragic as this one which life devised. The beginning is simple, the climax grandiose, of such wildness and rising to such heights, that the end no longer could be pure tragedy. It turned into tragi-comedy, that grotesque sensation which we feel when destiny grows beyond human beings and over-towers them, while they are still struggling with pigmy hands to master a monstrous force which has long gone beyond their control.

The beginning was conventional. One day Verlaine received a letter from an acquaintance in the provinces, in which poems by a fifteen-year-old boy were enclosed. Verlaine's opinion was asked. The poems were: *_Les Effarés_*, *_Les Assis_*, *_Les Poètes de sept ans_*, *_Les Premières communions_*. Every one knows they were Arthur Rimbaud's, for the poems of this boy are among the most precious of French literature. He began where the best stop and then, at twenty, threw literature aside as something irksome and unimportant. Verlaine read them and was filled with enthusiasm. He wrote to the boy in a tone of glowing admiration. In the meantime the poems made the rounds in Paris. Words of characteristically French emphasis are quickly coined. Victor Hugo with his regal gesture declared the author to be "*_Shakespeare enfant_*."

The provincial associations of Charleville filled Rimbaud with disgust and unrest. Verlaine in his enthusiasm wrote to him "Come, dear great soul, we are waiting for you, we want you." He himself was without a position and his own life in Paris at that time was threatened with chaos and uncertainty, but with the marvellous folly of yielding and emotional natures he invited a stranger as guest into his shaken destiny.

Rimbaud came. He was a big, robust fellow filled with a demonic physical force like that which Balzac has breathed into his Vautrin types. He was a provincial with massive red fists and the curious face of a child that has been corrupted early in life--a gamin, but a genius. Everything in him is force, over-abundant, wild, exceptional virility, without aim and turned toward the infinite.

He is one of the conquistador type, who first lost his way in literature. He pours everything into it, fire, fulness, force, more, much more than great creators spend. Like a crater he throws out his mad fever dreams and visions of life such as perhaps only Dante has had before him. He hurls everything up into the infinite as if he would shatter it to bits. Destruction teems in this creation, a force ardent for power, a hand that would seize everything and crush it.

His poems are only sudden gestures of wrath. They resemble bloody tatters of raw flesh that have been torn with wild teeth from the body of reality. It is poetry "outside and above" all literature. Has there ever been a poet of modern times who thus threw poems on paper and then let the scraps flutter to the four winds? Without pose, unlike Stefan George or Mallarmé, who calculate carefully, he despised the public and literature. He never had a single line printed by his own efforts, he was utterly regardless of the fleeting examples of his gigantic power. At twenty he left his fame and companions behind to wander through the world. In Africa he founded fantastic realms, he sat in prison and there played a part in world history preparing under King Menelik for the struggle which cost Italy her provinces. But in three years he wrote many poems full of power and fire, including the eternal poem *Le bateau ivre*, a staggering fever dream, into which all the colors, sounds, forms and forces of life seem to have been poured, bubbling in curious forms and seething in the glow of a feverish moment. His life was like a dream, as wild, as mighty and as little subject to time.

Verlaine gladly sheltered the awkward boy. Madame Verlaine was less enthusiastic and never concealed her dislike. Perhaps, with a woman's instinct, she unconsciously foresaw the danger which threatened Verlaine in this new companion.

The bond of friendship grew closer and closer. Verlaine's *gaminerie* which was ever in contrast with his sensitivity, awakened suddenly. His tendency toward strong, cynical and lascivious conversation met a genial match in Rimbaud. The primitive element in Verlaine was suddenly enchained by the primæval, purely human and brutal masculinity of Rimbaud's personality. The feminine in his nature was feeling for completion. As if predestined for each other for years, their personalities dovetail. Without any affection, by necessity rather than by friendship, their union becomes closer and closer. One day in 1872 Verlaine leaves wife, child and the world in which he lived to wander with Rimbaud into the unknown.

Without doubt there was an element of the abnormal in the relations between Verlaine and Rimbaud, but to understand their friendship it is neither necessary nor essential to know whether the dangerous potentialities that inhere in so strong a personal enthusiasm ever became material facts.

Their path led over the highways and also through prisons. "An evil rage for travelling" had seized the two. Through Belgium, through Germany and England they wandered; usually they were without means. They stayed in London for a while, supporting themselves by teaching languages and delving deeper than ever into social politics. Rimbaud left and returned just in time to convey the sick Verlaine home. The terrible life which he had led had broken him down. He himself has concealed the tragic incidents of those days in a novelette, "_Louise Leclercq_."

There he wrote: "The few half-crowns which he earned daily in giving lessons, they spent in the evening on Portuguese wine and Irish beer. The stomach was forgotten, the head became affected and the lessons were not given, and thus hunger and nervousity overcame the reason of this brave fellow."

The patient is taken to Bouillon, a small town in the Ardennes, where Charles van Lerberghe, the great Belgium poet, lived, but he has hardly half recovered when he plunges out into the world again with Rimbaud. Mental unrest is transformed into physical unrest. The lack of stability which operated most impulsively in that crisis, appears in his external life. There is nothing definite for which he is seeking yet he is unsatisfied. Verlaine, man of moods _par excellence_, adjusts himself to life in his own manner. He becomes boorish, subject to fits of passion, violent and unaccountable. His tenderness seems to have been strangled by hunger, drunkenness and wild destiny. The friendship for Rimbaud also assumes evil shapes. More and more frequently they quarrel; almost every hour Rimbaud's foaming temperament and Verlaine's temporary hard, wild manner come in conflict. Of course, as a rule, they were drunk. Rimbaud, who was strong, drank because of his feeling of strength and because he yearned for the intoxication in which colors glowed, in which impulses became wilder, and association more rapid, acute and bolder. Verlaine fled to absinthe to drown out repentance, anguish and weakness; and from this sweetish drink, in which all the evil forces of life seem to be distilled, he drew brutality and feverish disorders.

Once Verlaine ran away, but became repentant and asked Rimbaud to join him. Rimbaud followed him to Belgium. All difficulties were about to be solved. Madame Verlaine was ready to forgive and was on her way to meet the penitent. Then Rimbaud too declared that he would leave him. No one knows how it happened, whether it was jealousy, anger, hatred, love or only drunkenness, at any rate the disaster followed on the public street of Brussels. Verlaine pursued Rimbaud and shot at him twice with a revolver, wounding him once. The police came, and though Rimbaud defended and excused Verlaine, the latter was arrested. The sentence was two years in prison, and these Verlaine spent at Mons. The immediate result was a divorce, upon which Madame Verlaine insisted with every

possible emphasis and in spite of Victor Hugo's intervention.

This conclusion, however, was too banal and trite for so heroic a tragedy. The friendship persisted. Verlaine and Rimbaud corresponded. Verlaine sent occasional poems from prison and told Rimbaud of his conversion. The latter hardly pleased Rimbaud, who was at that time cold and indifferent toward everything except that he was filled with a thirst for something unique and infinite and looking forward to new adventures. Verlaine had hardly been released before he tried to convert Rimbaud to this religious life in order to link their lives anew. "Let us love each other in Jesus Christ," he wrote in his proselyting ardor and with the enthusiasm which in the beginning he always felt for everything. Rimbaud smiled mockingly and finally declared that "Loyola" should visit him in Stuttgart.

Now the moment arrived when comedy outdid the tragedy of the reunion. Verlaine arrived at Stuttgart and attempted the conversion--unfortunately in an inn, a place little adapted for proselytes and prophets, for both the saint and the mocker still had in common their passion for drink. No one witnessed the scene; only the result is known. On the way home both were drunk, and a quarrel ensued and a unique incident in the history of literature followed.

In the flooding moonlight by the banks of the Neckar the two greatest living poets in France fell upon each other in wild rage with sticks and fists. The struggle did not last long. Rimbaud, athletic, like a wild animal, a man of passion, easily subdued the nervous, weakly Verlaine, stumbling in drunkenness. A blow over the head knocked him down. Bleeding and unconscious, he remained lying on the bank.

It was the last time they saw each other. Verlaine disappeared on the next day. The episode had come to an end, but nevertheless several letters passed back and forth. Then Rimbaud's grandiose Odyssey through the entire world began. For many years his friends in Paris believed him dead, and even to-day relatively little is known of his life afterward.[2]

[2] A Biography and a volume of Rimbaud's correspondence have recently been published by his brother-in-law, Paterne Berrichon. They throw much light upon his remarkable career.

In Vienna he was under arrest as a vagrant, in the Balkans he was a merchant. Then fulfilling his early prophecy in the *_Bateau ivre_* he said farewell to Europe and in Africa became discoverer, general, conqueror. In these unexpected fields he spent to the last limits his titanic energy, which in youthful crises had been expended on the fragile and for him too weakly material of language and rhyme. Until the day of his death, he, *_the only true despiser of literature of these*

days_, never wrote another line, and endeavored only to give form to his wild and fantastic dreams in the material of life, dying in fever as feverishly he lived.

For Verlaine it was an episode--the most important, it is true, in a life which was torn to many tatters. After his conversion, which will be discussed more fully later, he returned to Paris and literature, and died in harness, physically in 1896, as artist much earlier.



PD Weekly is a Creative Commons Non-Commercial Copyrighted work by Matt Pierard, 2017.